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Summary record of the 40th meeting
Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Monday, 1 October 2018, at 3 p.m.

Chair: Ms. Bras Gomes

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The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Consideration of reports

(a) Reports submitted by States parties in accordance with articles 16 and 17 of the Covenant (*continued*)

Second periodic report of Turkmenistan (E/C.12/TKM/2; E/C.12/TKM/Q/2 and E/C.12/TKM/Q/2/Add.1)

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of Turkmenistan took places at the Committee table.*

2. **Mr. Hajiyev** (Turkmenistan), introducing his country's second periodic report, said that, over the previous seven years, significant progress had been made in public policy and on socioeconomic issues in Turkmenistan. The Government had adopted a revised Constitution with 11 additional articles on human rights and freedoms to align the Constitution with international law. Article 9 of the new Constitution established that the State party recognized the primacy of the universally accepted norms of international law.

3. Since it had last reported to the Committee, Turkmenistan had acceded to the Paris Agreement under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the Bern Convention for the Protection of Literary and Artistic Works, the Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict (the Hague Convention) and its 1954 and 1999 protocols, and the Protocol to Eliminate Illicit Trade in Tobacco Products. In addition, new legislation had been adopted and existing legislation had been amended to strengthen economic, social and cultural rights.

4. The Ombudsman Act had entered into force in January 2017; the Ombudsman had been appointed in March 2017 and the Ombudsman's Office had been established subsequently. The Ombudsman's activities complemented those of the existing State mechanisms for the protection of human rights and freedoms.

5. In order to increase the accountability of ministries and government departments in the field of human rights, national action plans on gender equality, children and trafficking in persons were being implemented. When developing those plans, the Government had taken into account the recommendations contained in the previous concluding observations of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (E/C.12/TKM/CO/1) and its most recent universal periodic review.

6. The Government was working with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the National Institute for Democracy and Human Rights to implement the national action plan on human rights for 2016–2020. Within that framework, the Government was making efforts to fulfil its obligations in relation to the Sustainable Development Goals. Turkmenistan had officially adopted the Goals in September 2016, and a working group had been established with representatives of relevant ministries and government departments to oversee their implementation. A research and training centre had been established at the International Relations Institute specifically to work on the Sustainable Development Goals. The country's voluntary national review of its implementation of the 2030 Agenda would be presented in 2019.

7. In 2016, Turkmenistan had signed the Partnership Framework for Development for the period 2016–2020 with UNDP, and had reached funding agreements with UNDP, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and other agencies. At present, over 20 projects, some of which received Government funding, were being carried out in Turkmenistan in cooperation with United Nations agencies.

8. The priorities of the national investment policy were to promote the fundamental modernization of the production sector and to accelerate the development of import-substitution and export-oriented production. Approximately 68 per cent of State investment went to the production sector, the amount having increased twelvefold over the previous decade. The equivalent of approximately US$ 10 million had been invested in implementing the updated national programme for the improvement of social and living conditions in villages, towns and cities for the period to 2020. To date, 257 kindergartens

and 231 schools had been built under the programme, as well as 66 hospitals and 137 clinics and health centres. Sports facilities and stadiums with up to 10,000 seats had also been constructed, as well as numerous theatres, museums and libraries. Eighteen water treatment plants had been built in an effort to improve access to clean drinking water, and over 4,500 kilometres of road had been laid or rebuilt.

9. Over the previous decade, the share of Government revenue coming from taxes had averaged 85 to 88 per cent, with personal income tax contributing 7 or 8 per cent; the number and rate of taxes had not changed since the introduction of the Tax Code in 2004. Approximately 70 per cent of government expenditure went on social policies. Efforts had been made to improve social protection by increasing wages, pensions and maintenance allowances by 10 per cent every year since 2008; inflation had not exceeded 8.5 per cent during that period. Moreover, the Government paid the majority of costs for utilities, including water and gas, either from the State budget or from the income from government enterprises. Veterans of the Second World War, persons with disabilities and members of the armed forces who had served abroad, as well as members of their families, were entitled to free public services under the Social Welfare Code. In addition, over one million square metres of housing had been built over the previous year. As a result of the measures taken to increase and maintain the standard of living, Turkmenistan had been recognized as an upper-middle income country by the World Bank.

10. **Mr. Abashidze** (Country Rapporteur) said that he welcomed the timely submission of the second periodic report. However, the country's most recent core document dated from 2009 and it had been difficult to find data or statistics relevant to the implementation of the Covenant. He would like to have some examples of cases where the Covenant had been invoked in national courts, information on the availability of effective remedies for individuals claiming a violation of their rights under the Covenant, and any statistics on such cases and remedies.

11. With regard to the Ombudsman's Office, he would like to have some information on the submission of candidates for the post of Ombudsman and on the selection process, the funding received by the Office, and steps taken to ensure the Office's compliance with the principles relating to the status of national institutions for the promotion and protection of human rights (the Paris Principles) and its accreditation by the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions. He also wished to know whether the State Concept for the Development of the Judicial System for the period 2017–2021 provided for changes to the appointment and dismissal processes for judges, or whether those processes remained at the discretion of the President.

12. He welcomed the information provided by the delegation in response to the Committee's questions on the maximum available resources, but would appreciate further information on the issues raised in paragraph 4 of the list of issues, including the proportion of the population living below the nationally and internationally defined poverty lines, and the national levels of income inequality. He would also appreciate up-to-date statistical information on household living standards and on inflation-adjusted spending on social priorities, particularly in regard to education.

13. He would like to have further information on the extent to which the residence permit, or internal visa (*propiska*), system was tied to exemption from utility payments and the receipt of social welfare, including whether it was possible to receive such benefits without being registered in the system. Was it true that such benefits were to be discontinued from January 2019 and, if so, why?

14. The Committee had received information that so-called "third generation tests" were still used in employment. Did such discriminatory practices still take place? He would appreciate statistics disaggregated by ethnic group on education, housing and employment. He wished to know if any members of parliament were from ethnic minorities.

15. He welcomed the information provided about women's participation in the labour market, but would appreciate additional information about women in Government and academia, and on steps taken to address harmful social stereotypes about women. He also wished to know how the national action plan on gender equality for 2015–2020 was funded, and what concrete results had been achieved by it.

16. **Mr. Hajiyev** (Turkmenistan) said that the country's data-collection mechanisms had improved over the past seven years and, while the Government had previously submitted statistics to United Nations bodies, it could provide additional information if required.

17. **Ms. Sysoyeva** (Turkmenistan) said that the *propiska* system did not affect the employment of Turkmen citizens, who were able to choose their profession and place of work freely. Regardless of where a citizen was registered, issues related to social protection and welfare were addressed in the place where he or she was resident. Information on individual citizens, including their entitlements, could be transferred between different regions, which allowed citizens registered in one region to work in another. Foreign nationals, stateless persons and non-residents were required to register if they wished to work in Ashgabat. Employers were thereby able to guarantee the provision of housing for employees moving to the capital.

18. Since the population census in December 2012, sweeping changes had been made to the territorial and administrative structure of the country. Existing settlements had been combined, new towns and cities had been created and Ashgabat had been expanded. Owing to the boundary changes, it was not possible to use the census information for comparative purposes. A new census would be carried out in 2022 and work was already being done at the local level to ensure that it would be as reliable as possible, taking into account the boundary changes and labour migration within the country.

19. **Ms. Atajanova** (Turkmenistan) said that the Ombudsman's Office received the necessary support and had a full staff of eight people. In 2018, the Office had submitted its initial report to parliament; the report appeared on the Government's website, which also gave information on the Office's activities. Public awareness of its activities had been raised through newspaper articles and radio and television programmes. The work of the Office included visits to regional offices of the Institute for Democracy and Human Rights and it had also conducted a number of training seminars with civil society organizations.

20. Women accounted for over 20 per cent of members of parliament and were also represented in Cabinet, local government and academia. The national action plan on gender equality contained measures to have more women in leadership positions and increase their representation in government. The plan focused on raising awareness of gender issues, improving the relevant legislation and strengthening the national mechanism for women's rights. In December 2017, in cooperation with UNFPA, a compendium of international instruments on women's rights and relevant domestic legislation had been published and distributed to libraries, universities and the public-service training institution in every region. Under the national plan, the possibility of adopting a law on domestic violence was being explored. The aim was to complete the study on that topic by 2019 and make recommendations for a bill. In addition, a review of legislation on gender sensitivity had been carried out and gender had been discussed in the work being done on a new employment law. Pursuant to a recommendation by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, the provisions against polygamy contained in the Criminal Code had been added to the Family Code. The implementation of the national plan was monitored regularly and adjustments were made as necessary. All the activities under the plan should be completed by 2020.

21. The programme to improve the judicial system provided for judicial training and opportunities for gaining international experience.

22. **Mr. Hajiyev** (Turkmenistan) said that candidates for judicial posts were nominated by their peers; the President merely endorsed the nominations. Three members of parliament were from ethnic minorities, and persons of other ethnicities were employed at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and other government departments. The President had recently approved the citizenship applications of over 735 stateless persons from a variety of backgrounds.

23. **Ms. Babayeva** (Turkmenistan) said that ethnic minorities were represented in all areas of life. For instance, many of the nearly 39,000 students in higher education were Uzbek, Tatar, Iranian, Kazakh, Azerbaijani, Uighur, Berber, Armenian, Afghan or Ukrainian. Seventy per cent of teaching and administrative staff at the art and music schools were from minorities.

24. **Mr. Hajiyev** (Turkmenistan) said that the agenda of the People's Council was established on the basis of inputs from the general public received by various entities. At its first meeting, the President had reported on achievements since independence. In the early years, additional support for the population, in the form of free gas, electricity, water and other services, had been necessary as the State had been setting up its social structures. However, Turkmenistan had improved its economic situation and was gradually developing a market economy, which implied a change in approach to social benefits. The goal was to lessen the population's dependence on benefits and change its perception of resources and the environment. Other measures to that end included support for agriculture in the form of 99-year leases for tenant farmers and a review of the price of wheat and cotton. As in other countries in the region, farmers were required to allocate 70 per cent of their land to crops selected by the State but could grow what they wished on the remaining 30 per cent. No more than two close relatives could work for the same government department at any given time and public servants could not supervise anyone related to them.

25. **Ms. Atajanova** (Turkmenistan) said that Turkmenistan acknowledged the primacy of universally recognized norms by incorporating them into domestic legislation: international treaties to which it was a party took precedence over national laws. A new parliament had been elected in March, and the President had emphasized the need to develop modern laws that reflected the needs of the times and responded to the country's international commitments.

26. **Mr. Haljanov** (Turkmenistan) said that, contrary to Mr. Abashidze's assertion, the permanent mission in Geneva had submitted an updated core document in January 2016.

27. **Mr. Sadi** said that he wished to know what impact, if any, the Committee's concluding observations on the initial report of Turkmenistan had had on the State party's policies, laws and practices. It would be interesting to know whether the Ombudsman had dealt with any situations related to Covenant rights and, if so, whether its actions had made a difference. Noting that merely having laws banning discrimination was insufficient, he asked whether full gender equality was being pursued in Turkmenistan and to what extent the interpretation of a particular religion had affected how discrimination against women was viewed.

28. **Ms. Shin** (Country Task Force) said that she was not convinced by the argument that census information could not be used for the purposes of comparison because of changes to territorial boundaries. What the Committee was interested in was the extent to which the population enjoyed its economic, social and cultural rights. While she welcomed the news that work had started on the development of a law on domestic violence, it was equally important to address gender stereotyping, which led to a range of discriminatory practices, from dress codes to virginity tests. Accordingly, she wished to know what measures to eliminate negative stereotypes were included in the national action plan on gender equality. It would be useful to know to what extent non-governmental organizations had been involved in the drafting of the State party's report and whether reports that they struggled to be registered were true. Lastly, she would welcome the delegation's comments on anti-corruption efforts, including the adoption of laws, and would like to know whether any officials had ever been sentenced to prison or otherwise punished for corruption.

29. **Mr. Uprimny** said that, the delegation's earlier statement notwithstanding, the fact remained that, under the Constitution, the appointment and removal of judges was a prerogative of the President. Accordingly, he wished to know how the independence of the judiciary could be guaranteed in such a system and whether there were any plans to amend the relevant article of the Constitution. Some of the data provided by the State party, especially the data on infant mortality, differed wildly from the data received from other sources. It would be helpful to know whether the State party had any plans to decriminalize sexual intercourse between consenting same-sex partners and to introduce adequate protection against discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity. He wondered what had become of all the funds amassed during the years of high economic growth before the price of gas had fallen, causing the State to cut back on social programmes.

30. **Mr. Abdel-Moneim**, referring to the period 2008–2017, said that he welcomed the significant increase in government expenditure on utilities and housing and community development. However, given that State revenues had more than doubled during the same period, he would like to know why spending on the water supply and public health care had been slashed.

31. **The Chair** asked whether it was true that the Government intended to introduce fees for public goods and services that were currently provided free of charge and whether support would be made available to persons on low incomes in order to allow them to maintain equal access to the goods and services in question. Additional information would be welcome on domestic legislation prohibiting discrimination and on the number of cases of discrimination brought before the Ombudsman and their outcomes. She asked whether the State party intended to ratify the Optional Protocol to the Covenant.

32. **Mr. Abashidze** said that the State party was to be commended for its approach to the Sustainable Development Goals. Domestic legislation should be amended to enable the articles of the Covenant to be invoked before the courts. He asked whether the State party intended to adopt a comprehensive anti-discrimination law in the near future. It would be interesting to hear whether any statistics were available on the number of children with disabilities in mainstream education and whether the Government monitored their situation.

33. **Ms. Atajanova** (Turkmenistan) said that the Committee's recommendations, observations and comments had been carefully studied when designing the national action plans on gender equality, human rights, children and trafficking in persons. In 2017, the Ombudsman had received 40 written and 64 oral complaints regarding housing issues, with those figures rising to 93 and 115 respectively in 2018. The number of oral complaints received relating to labour issues, such as dismissal and access to employment, had risen from 21 in 2017 to 54 in 2018. A very small number of complaints had been received relating to pensions and benefits, including disability benefits.

34. There was no such thing as religious marriage in Turkmenistan, which was a secular State. The minimum age of marriage was 18 years for men and women, although exceptions could be made in cases where parental consent had been given and official authorization obtained. Children attended school from the age of 6 years to the age of 18 years, the age of legal majority.

35. Work was ongoing within schools and public-service training institutions to raise awareness of gender stereotypes and to promote gender equality. The President of Turkmenistan, speaking recently to the General Assembly, had stated that full gender equality was a national priority. Women were not forced to wear Turkmen national dress. A number of workshops on gender equality, gender-based violence and gender stereotypes would be held at the regional level in the near future, in cooperation with UNFPA and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. The recommendations of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women would be disseminated at the grass-roots level, in order to raise awareness and receive feedback in that regard.

36. Representatives of civil society organizations participated directly in the preparation of State party reports to human rights treaty bodies and in working groups set up to design action plans and related legislation on issues such as trafficking in persons. Those organizations also ran shelters for vulnerable members of society. As part of the national action plan on human rights, existing legislation on civil society organizations was currently being reviewed. There were no restrictions on the registration of such organizations in cases where the required documentation had been properly submitted. However, the registration process would be further simplified. Over 120 such organizations had recently been registered. Parliament was working with civil society to promote citizens' participation in decision-making processes.

37. **Mr. Ergeshov** (Turkmenistan) said that patients were actively involved in developing health-care programmes across the country. Since 2005, new criteria had been adopted regarding infant mortality statistics, which would explain the discrepancies between World Bank and domestic figures in that regard.

38. **Mr. Hajiyev** (Turkmenistan) said that all human rights treaty body recommendations were closely studied by each of the government ministries. Historically, women and girls had been free to dress as they pleased and to work in the field of their choice. Turkmen Muslims were followers of a particularly tolerant and open school of Islam. The Committee appeared to have been unduly influenced by a number of stereotypes about life in Turkmenistan.

39. A specialized unit had been set up to tackle corruption and several legislative measures had been taken in that regard. A number of large-scale, highly publicized investigations into allegations of corruption had been carried out, including investigations involving public servants and politicians. In 2018 alone, dozens of criminal cases had been opened regarding corruption in the education sector.

40. Consensual same-sex sexual activity was not a criminal offence in Turkmenistan. However, under the Criminal Code, violent male-on-male sexual assault was illegal. The recommendations regarding non-traditional relationships arising from the May 2018 cycle of the universal periodic review were currently being examined.

41. The Government had invested tens of billions of dollars of public money in the energy sector infrastructure, in order to diversify the economy. Nevertheless, in total, 70 per cent of the national budget was allocated to programmes designed to meet social needs. The issue of the ratification of the Optional Protocol to the Covenant was under consideration. The officials who had decided to cut social benefits had done so without fully understanding the impact of such a move on vulnerable sectors of society. A nominal fee was being introduced for communal and housing services.

42. **Ms. Shin** said that it would be useful to have specific data for the past five years on unemployment and employment rates, disaggregated by sex, urban and rural residence, ethnic origin, age and disability.

43. The Committee would be grateful for clarification regarding the removal of hundreds of Turkmen nationals from Ashgabat owing to their failure to register as residents of the city and the impact of removal on their right to employment.

44. She asked whether the review of existing domestic legislation prohibiting women from engaging in night work and certain other types of work would be completed in the near future and whether that ban would be lifted. Women, both with and without children, wishing to work should be provided with support.

45. She wished to know whether the minimum wage was sufficient to ensure a decent standard of living, whether it was adjusted annually to reflect changes in the price of consumer goods and whether it was enforced throughout the country, including in the informal sector. The delegation should comment on reports that civil servants were required to contribute part of their salaries to the State, and explain whether, for the purpose of applying the principle of equal pay for work of equal value, a system was in place to compare the relative values of different jobs. She would appreciate information on the monitoring of labour conditions, on occupational diseases and accidents, and on how, in the absence of a law on sexual harassment, complaints could be filed and handled appropriately.

46. Noting that all trade unions in the State party operated under the National Trade Union Centre and were de facto State-controlled, she asked whether it was true that persons working for State institutions dared not contest violations of their rights for fear of losing their jobs or income. The delegation should also respond to allegations that State employees were often forced to participate in State-organized mass events and that some employees in that situation had died as a result of working long hours in deplorable conditions. It would be useful to know what was being done to eliminate the practice of forced participation in such events and what measures were being or would be taken to ensure that trade unions could be established and operated without State control or interference. In paragraph 105 of its replies to the list of issues (E/C.12/TKM/Q/2/Add.1), the State party made clear that there were no provisions in domestic legislation on the right to strike and that there had not been a single case of strike action during its entire history as an independent nation. She

wondered whether the lack of strikes was attributable to a fear of the consequences that might arise therefrom.

47. She would be grateful to receive detailed information on social security measures and services, including child allowance, old-age pensions and disability and unemployment benefits. It was not clear, from the information supplied by the State party to date, how much support was provided and what progress had been made in recent years. Lastly, she asked whether the retirement age was different for men and women, and, if so, why.

48. **Ms. Sysoyeva** (Turkmenistan) said that, prior to 2013, it had been illegal, under the Labour Code, for women with children under the age of 3 years or with children with disabilities under the age of 18 years to perform night work, to work overtime, at weekends, on non-working holidays or memorial days, or to engage in shift work. In 2013, in response to recommendations from, among others, the International Labour Organization, amendments had been introduced to bring the Code into line with relevant international norms and standards. Consequently, the aforementioned restrictions on women's labour had been lifted, and there had since been a decrease in the gender pay gap, which currently compared favourably to that found in many other countries.

49. In practice, women frequently made use of their right under domestic law to refuse to work under certain conditions, which had an impact on their salary. Women also more frequently adopted a flexible work schedule than men in order to reconcile their work with their family responsibilities.

50. The Ministry of Labour and Social Protection, in conjunction with the Ministry of Health, had drawn up a list of hazardous occupations in which women's participation was limited or banned. It had been decided that, in future, permission to perform the jobs in question would be granted on the basis of physiological and physical aptitude rather than purely sex-based considerations.

51. Labour inspections were carried out by the State in all regions and cities, and there was a department of the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection devoted to monitoring labour conditions. The Ministry was in the process of developing a system that would enable employees working in unfavourable conditions to claim compensation from their employers. Complaints regarding workplace accidents were resolved promptly and had, in the case of certain fatal accidents in the past, led to the closure of facilities. Investigations were sometimes carried out by experts from the Ministry, who had the power to impose penalties under the Code of Administrative Offences.

52. The minimum wage stood at 715 manat and was adjusted annually in line with the minimum level required for subsistence, which was calculated on the basis of the cost of a consumer basket of goods. From 1 January 2019, pursuant to a presidential decree signed in July 2018, the minimum wage would rise to 790 manat, which equated to around a 10 per cent increase. The decree applied to persons working in all sectors of the economy.

53. Under the same decree, the financial support provided through social security measures and services would also increase by about 10 per cent in 2019. Old-age pensions and disability benefits were calculated using a baseline figure established annually in accordance with the Code of 19 October 2012 on Social Protection of the Population. The State pension was paid out of the State Pension Fund, which was fed by contributions from employers and employees. The State budget for 2019 had been prepared and was due to be presented for adoption imminently. The amount of child allowance to which a woman was entitled depended on how many children she had. The top figure of 1,333 manat was granted to women with five or more children. Women also received 173 manat per child below 3 years of age in January each year. Social security statistics were published periodically on the website of the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection. The pensionable age was set at 57 years for women and 62 years for men, though women with children had the possibility of taking early retirement. There were currently no plans to equalize the pensionable age for men and women.

54. While it was true that the right to strike was not provided for under domestic legislation, there was a special law governing various forms of assembly, including mass events. The purpose of many demonstrations was to air grievances or put forward demands

of a political or economic nature. In Turkmenistan, such grievances were very often settled at an early stage by reconciliation committees, obviating the need for strike action. According to the records of the Supreme Court, no collective dispute cases had ever been brought before the Court. Almost all disputes involved individuals and tended to be prompted by, for example, dissatisfaction over a forced relocation or the reasons given for a dismissal. Figures related to disputes settled by reconciliation committees could be made available if necessary.

55. **Ms. Atajanova** (Turkmenistan) said that the issue of sexual harassment, including in the workplace, would be addressed as part of efforts by a parliamentary working group to draft a new Criminal Code. The group was drawing inspiration from legislation in other States and looking to develop mechanisms for the submission of complaints. Currently, victims of sexual harassment could lodge a complaint with the Ombudsman or with their employer's human resources department.

56. **Mr. Hajiyev** (Turkmenistan) said that the reality of State-organized mass events was different to the image portrayed by some media outlets. Participation in such events was optional, and all necessary medical precautions were taken. The special law governing various forms of assembly had been adopted in 2015 and amended in 2018. After decades of having a one-party system, Turkmenistan needed to be given time to allow its political culture to develop naturally, without the kind of outside interference that had been observed in other countries.

57. **Mr. Dasgupta** (Country Task Force) said that he would welcome a response to paragraph 18 of the list of issues (E/C.12/TKM/Q/2), in which the Committee requested updated information on whether a draft national action plan on children's rights had been finalized under the national action plan on human rights for 2016–2020 and whether it contained specific measures to effectively eliminate child labour and the trafficking of children.

58. With regard to paragraph 17 of the list of issues, he noted that, in paragraph 114 of its replies, the State party mentioned a study which would form the basis for an assessment of the feasibility of developing draft legislation on domestic violence. He asked why a preliminary study was required and why it would ever not be feasible to draft a law penalizing domestic violence.

59. The State party had not given a response to paragraph 19 of the list of issues, in which the Committee requested statistical data on poverty, including on the number of persons under the poverty line, disaggregated by year, sex, ethnic group and urban and rural residence. He would appreciate information on the numbers of people living under the poverty line and in extreme poverty, on the progress that had been achieved in reducing poverty through the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals and on whether there had been a failure to track and analyse trends in poverty reduction.

60. Turning to paragraph 20 of the list of issues, he noted that, in paragraph 117 of its replies, the State party referred to "improved drinking water". He wished to know what was meant by the term and how the quality of the water that it designated compared to internationally accepted standards for what was typically called "safe drinking water".

61. It would be helpful to know the numbers of doctors per 1,000 people in both urban and rural areas and whether there had been any improvement in those figures over the previous five years. He also wished to know whether there was any substance to reports of widespread corruption in the health sector, involving the payment of bribes in exchange for access to expensive treatment or drugs. What measures, if any, were being taken to combat corruption in health care, how many cases had been uncovered as part of anti-corruption initiatives and how many convictions had been handed down in that regard?

62. **Mr. Sadi** asked whether there were any restrictions on the use of insecticides or pesticides, in view of the overwhelming evidence to suggest that such substances posed a carcinogenic risk to humans, and whether any campaigns had been launched to raise public awareness of that risk and of the potentially harmful impact of consuming genetically modified foods.

63. **Ms. Liebenberg** said that the Committee had received reports from non-governmental organizations of properties being demolished and their previous occupiers being moved to substandard, overcrowded housing. With that in mind, she would be grateful for information on any laws governing evictions and, in particular, on whether they provided for prior notice, consultation and the provision of adequate alternative accommodation.

64. **Mr. Windfuhr**, noting that article 69 of the newly revised Constitution of Turkmenistan prohibited all forms of forced and child labour, said that it had presumably been felt that there was a need for such an article; and yet data on the issue of forced and child labour had not been forthcoming. He would appreciate a description of the situation in the State party in that regard and of how the Government planned to implement the aforementioned article. It would also be useful to receive statistics on the employment of persons with disabilities and to hear from the delegation about the main obstacles to the systematic collection of such statistics.

65. Given that Turkmenistan was one of the driest countries on Earth, he would be interested to know the delegation's assessment of the impact of climate change on water availability and quality, and on the agricultural sector in general, in which women accounted for 43 per cent of the labour force.

66. **The Chair** said that she would welcome a detailed description of the State party's housing policies, bearing in mind reports that, in recent years, there had been considerable investment in the construction of grand buildings, many of which were currently unoccupied or underoccupied for reasons including a lack of water and sewerage connections.

67. **Mr. Uprimny** asked how the Government guaranteed the right of persons deprived of their liberty to an adequate standard of living in the face of chronic prison overcrowding.

The meeting rose at 6 p.m.